

Submerged Aquatic Vegetation

Talking Points

- The submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) restoration goal adopted by the Chesapeake Bay Program is 185,000 acres by 2010.
- Total acreage in 2004 was estimated to be 72,935 acres—39% of the goal. There was a 14% baywide increase from 2003 to 2004, mainly due to large increases in the lower salinity zone. The 2004 area was below the 2002 high point (89,619 acres, or 48% of the goal), because there was a 30% decline from 2002 to 2003.
- Through the efforts of Chesapeake Bay Program partners, water quality is being improved by reducing the nutrient and suspended sediment content of runoff entering the Bay and its rivers. Improved water quality, especially water clarity, is critical to achieving the SAV restoration goal.
- In areas with adequate water quality, targeted SAV restoration projects can help stimulate the recovery of SAV, but cannot on their own achieve the goal.
- NOAA's Chesapeake Bay Office and Restoration Center have funded SAV restoration since 1996. Recent NCBO-supported SAV projects have planted 13 acres of eelgrass in two projects on the Piankatank (five acres) and Patuxent (eight acres) Rivers.
- NCBO-supported projects also have developed better methods to collect and plant eelgrass seeds for large-scale planting.
- NCBO staff have given technical assistance to a variety of small-scale SAV planting projects.
- SAV is being protected through regulations that protect shallow-water habitats during dredging and other activities.

Background

- Abundance and distribution of SAV declined dramatically starting in the late 1960s, but have recovered since the mid-1980s.
- SAV are plants that grow in shallow water—to the surface but not above it. They:
 - provide habitat for juvenile and adult fish and shell fish and protect them from predators;
 - provide food for waterfowl, fish, and mammals;
 - absorb wave energy and nutrients, produce oxygen, and improve water clarity;
 - and settle suspended sediment in the water, stabilize bottom sediments, and protect shorelines from erosion.
- NOAA's Chesapeake Bay Office established a new SAV Restoration Program in FY03 and competitively awarded \$553K to five projects in Maryland and Virginia. In FY04, NCBO awarded \$809K to continue these projects and to support two new projects.